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# STORYTELLING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS



# STORYTELLING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS: HOW TO CREATE A PHOTO ESSAY



## KINDLE EDITION

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Above: Fishing with trained cormorants, Yangshuo, Guangxi, China

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## Who this book is for

This book is for students, amateur and professional photographers alike. It is chock-a-block with ideas for telling your story through your own photo essay, and will help you to find a suitable topic, plan your shots, edit the story, show you different ways to share it with the world, and lots more. Whether you are interested in this book because photography is your passion or because you are looking for a new revenue stream, the road map this book provides will guide you swiftly and surely to creating your own photo essays.

A growing number of photographers are losing interest in amassing a collection of single images and are looking for new and more satisfying ways to express themselves. If this sounds like you, then you might find that making photo essays is more creatively satisfying and it could lead to a new direction in your hobby or career.

Many photographers' careers have been assisted by magazines which had a strong dependence on the photo essay such as *Life*, a weekly magazine which ran from 1883 to 1972 and then intermittently until 2007. Other illustrated magazines which started up in the first half of the twentieth century include *Paris Match*, *Epoca* and *Look*.

However, this type of magazine is now in decline as the screen has superseded the printed page as the main way we view photographs. This doesn't mean there isn't a demand for the photo essay, it just means that photographers have to look for new outlets to present their work. The financial support that photographers enjoyed from magazines such as *Life* no longer exists but in its place there is a new-found freedom to create because as photographers, we no longer have to address the concerns of the picture editor.

Today, there are new ways to present your work and to monetize your photographs, and the freedom which comes with being able to choose your own assignments can lead to greater independence, originality and satisfaction. Storytelling through photographs is now available to everyone.

## How to view the images in this book

The images in this Kindle book have been optimized for viewing but to get the best from them you need to see them full screen. If you have a Kindle Fire you can tap twice on the image and it will be enlarged. You can then pinch and zoom on the image to zoom further if you want more detail.

If you are viewing an image which is portrait format but the screen is in landscape mode, you need to have the screen unlocked so that after the double tap, you can rotate the screen and then pinch and zoom. When you want to return to the text just tap the cross icon in the top right.

If you have a different device to mine, such as one of the Kindles 1-4 or the Kindle Touch you may find this blog post helpful:

<http://kindleworld.blogspot.fr/2011/12/kindle-tip-for-all-kindles-images-san.html>

# 1. Before You Start

## What is a photo essay?

Simply put, a photo essay is a way of telling a story through a series of photographs, by one photographer, and may be as little as three or four images or as many as 20-30 or even more. A picture *story*, on the other hand, is usually a series of photographs by two or more photographers.

The images in a photo essay are ordered in a specific way, often chronologically or as a series, with the aim of engaging the viewer's emotions as well as their mind. Captions may be used to help the audience understand the individual images but the text is always subordinate to the pictures. In other words, the images do not illustrate the text, the text supports the images.

The sequencing of a photo essay is often, but not always, ordered in such a way that a narrative evolves, much the same way as a narrative in a spoken or written story evolves. Documentary photographers and photojournalists often use the photo essay to show how events have unfolded, to convey strong emotions and engage the viewer in interesting concepts. James Nachtwey, Mary Ellen Mark, Sebastião Salgado and Peter Magubane are documentary photographers who have all used the photo essay to great effect.

So try to think of the photo essay as being something like a theatre piece. The images have actors and a setting in which events unfold. As the photographer, you are the director and can choose which actors you want in your story, which scenes you want include, and how you will arrange them. The choices you can make are limitless.

## Myth number 1: Photographs don't lie

There are many photographs which you might think tell a story by themselves such as Eddie Adams Pulitzer Prize-winning image of the South Vietnam's Chief of National Police, called General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, in which a handcuffed prisoner called Lém, who was suspected of being a member of the Viet Cong is being summarily shot in the street. The photograph won Adams the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography and became an iconic image of the anti-war movement.





The execution was horrific and arguably the world at large needed to witness the event but Adams later said he regretted the impact the photograph had made. To the public, this was a savage act and people reacted with revulsion towards Loan. Sympathy was with Lém who seems to be standing there helplessly with his hands tied behind his back as the bullet passed through his brain.

Loan claimed that the shooting had not been a rash act, as it appeared, but that it had been carried out because he believed that people like Lém were killing Loan's own people. He believed it had to be done and was totally justified within the context of the war.

As a result of the publication of this photograph, Loan's reputation was destroyed and his family was badly affected. Adams said that people believe photos, but that photos do lie, even when not manipulated in post processing. In Adams' own words "They are only half-truths" because what the photo doesn't tell you is *why* Loan shot the man, and to this day it is still unclear.

A photograph can make you believe that it is the truth, even when only half the facts are present in the image, which of necessity must be the case as an image is merely a moment in time. Never assume that the knowledge you have of an event is obviously present in your photo – always get feedback from others, people who you trust will be honest in their appraisal.

## Myth number 2: Every picture tells a story

Because a single image shows us just one moment in time there cannot be a progressive narrative as this would rely on there being a past and a future as well. The events which you witness when taking a photograph take place in time. However, unlike a film or a book, a single photo taken within that time stream will not have a narrative because everything within the scene is presented simultaneously to the viewer. A photograph does not *tell* a story, it *shows* us events. This is an important distinction.

Moreover, the way in which you or I read those events will be in a different order. In a book, there is a past and a future but because time does not exist in a linear fashion in a picture, everyone is free to 'read' the events in any order they choose. However, with a photo essay you can present several photographs, showing many moments in time and in this way it is possible to create a narrative story.

In this context, consider another Pulitzer Prize-winning image this time by a young photojournalist called **Kevin Carter**. Carter's photograph (below) shows of a young, emaciated Sudanese child crawling along the ground, trying to reach a nearby feeding station. A vulture waits nearby. It looks like it is waiting for the child to die, and it would seem that there is no one else around except, of course, the photographer.

The New York Times published the photo on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1993 and was swamped with people wanting to know what happened to the child. The newspaper said it was not known whether she reached the feeding station or not. Many people asked why the photographer was busy taking pictures when he could surely have assisted the child. Carter was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for this image but committed suicide three months later. He was 33 years old.



But according to [João Silva](#), a Portuguese photographer also present at the scene, the parents had only left their children briefly to get food from a recently landed UN plane which was stationed nearby. He said that Carter took the image from a distance of about 10 feet, and then chased the bird away. This information was not available when the image was first published. If this picture had been one of a series, showing us before and after images, perhaps the public's strong opinions with regard to Carter might have created a different outcome for the young photographer.

So even an iconic image such as either of the two mentioned above only shows us a small part of the story, a single moment in time, never the whole story in itself although that doesn't detract from the power a single image can have.

In summary:

1. A photo essay is a way of telling a story through a series of photographs
2. A picture story is a series of photographs by two or more photographers
3. A photo essay is like a theatre piece with actors and a setting in which events unfold
4. You are the director and can choose which actors and scenes you want to include
5. In a photo essay, the images do not illustrate the text, the text (captions) supports the images
6. A photograph can make you believe that it is the truth, even when only half the facts are present in the image
7. A single photograph is only a single moment in time
8. A photograph doesn't tell a story, it shows events
9. Never assume that the knowledge you have of an event is obviously present in your photo

## 2. The Single Image

### Does your image convey emotion?

A photo essay is comprised of single images so it's important to think about the elements that go to make up a great shot. Like Kevin Carter's image above, the most striking and memorable photographs convey strong emotion. This is particularly true of journalistic photos which depict war events such as *The Atomic Cloud over Nagasaki* by [Hiromichi Matsuda](#) taken in 1945. The image (below) was taken 20 minutes after the bomb was dropped and the predominant emotions it evokes when we see the looming mushroom cloud in the background and the people strolling casually in the foreground, are those of horror and disbelief.



Of course not all photographs show events which create negative emotions. Consider "The Kiss" by [Alfred Eisenstaedt](#) (below) which was shot on V-J Day (Victory over Japan Day), the day on which Japan surrendered, signifying the end of World War II. This one photograph sums up the emotions of euphoria and freedom that everyone felt on that momentous occasion. Well, everyone except the cat that is!



Below is another example of emotions conveyed in an image which I took while travelling in China. It's a simple street shot which shows two young people sitting together on a wall. Clearly there is some kind of struggle going on. The girl does not look happy and the boy seems to be trying to persuade her of something, even against her will perhaps. And is that red bag hers or his? Is he trying to take the bag



away from her? Note that facial expressions *and* body language are important in shots like this. For example, note how her legs are angled inwards in a protective way, while his legs are angled outwards in a more assertive manner.



So think carefully about the emotions that your chosen theme evokes in you as well as the emotions that the people you will be photographing feel. Maybe it's joy or anger, fear or excitement... if you can convey those emotions through your images, you will be able to connect powerfully with your viewers.

Although it may seem difficult to plan shots like these in advance, you need to have an idea of what you want to express before you start shooting in order to increase the odds of capturing exactly the images you want.

## Layers of meaning

The next image below is of a young Muslim boy, which I also shot whilst travelling in China. He was standing in the doorway of his home watching me as I walked by. I noticed he was holding a soft toy in one hand which is not unusual for a child of that age. Then I noticed the toy gun he was holding in the other hand and I took the photo.

So what meaning can we derive from this image? Is it a statement about children? Or Muslims? Or a statement about parenting? Is it suggesting that we give out mixed messages to our children, that notions of war and peace can be inculcated at a young age through

our nurturing choices? Or a statement about young boys and what the future holds for them as men who may become soldiers or even terrorists? Or is it a more generalised philosophical statement about choice?

Perhaps you can add to the list above. Whatever ideas it holds for you, I hope you can see that an image which has several layers of meaning can hold your viewers' attention for longer and will also appeal to a wider audience. Although you may not be able to consciously choose to shoot images with several layers of meaning, watch out for this kind of shot when you select your images in the editing phase of your photo essay.





## Colour versus black and white

Traditionally, black and white photography has been associated with a documentary style of photography and many photographers feel that working in black and white treats their subjects more seriously. For example, if you are shooting a subject where there is obvious

suffering, then it can seem just too frivolous to shoot in colour.

However, you have to match your choice to your subject and sometimes colour works better. A good example of this is *Falkland Road*, Mary Ellen Mark's coverage of sex workers in Bombay. Her photographs of prostitutes and their clients often have colours that are very vivid, sometimes harsh and almost unnatural. The garish colours somehow add to the vulgarity of the scenes which are often very explicit.

At the same time, the strong, saturated colours contrast with the beautiful, dark skin of the people being photographed creating an artistic quality which is seemingly at odds with her subject.

The choice of colour or black and white is a personal one but think in advance which would work better with your subject. If you decide to shoot in black and white, you would be better to set your camera to RAW and convert to black and white in post processing as your photos will have a greater tonal range if converted properly. Shooting in RAW will also ensure that no data is lost so if you want to go back to colour later you have the choice.

## Angle of view

My most important tip for getting good images is to be aware of the angle at which you are shooting as it can change everything in an image. Bending your knees or climbing a hill can radically alter the view. Check out the image below. One of the reasons it works so well is because of the carefully chosen angle.

At first glance, it looks like the four men on the girder are precariously balanced hundreds of feet above ground but in fact they are only balanced a few feet above the group of men to the right. If they fell they would land on the same platform that the group of men to the right are standing on. If the photographer had chosen a slightly higher angle to shoot at, we would have seen the platform below and the feeling of vertigo would have been lost. So as you can see, getting the shooting angle right can make or break an image.



Above: Two waiters serve lunch to steel workers at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel while it was under construction in 1930 (Photo: Keystone/Getty Images)

## Consistency

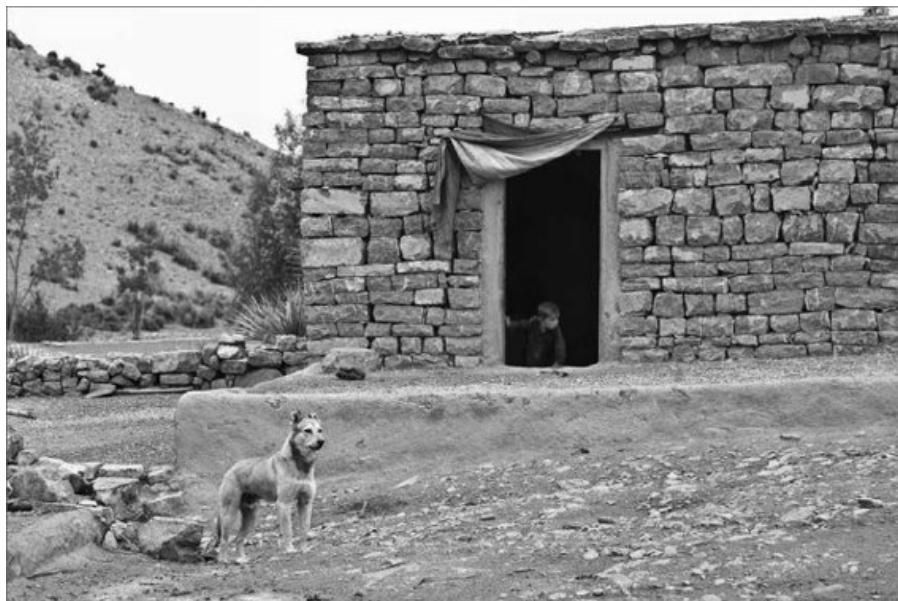
I've talked about the timelessness of a single image, conveying emotion, finding the best angle and looking for layers of meaning but before we move on to the next section which looks at the different types of photo essays you may want to create, I want to say something about consistency.

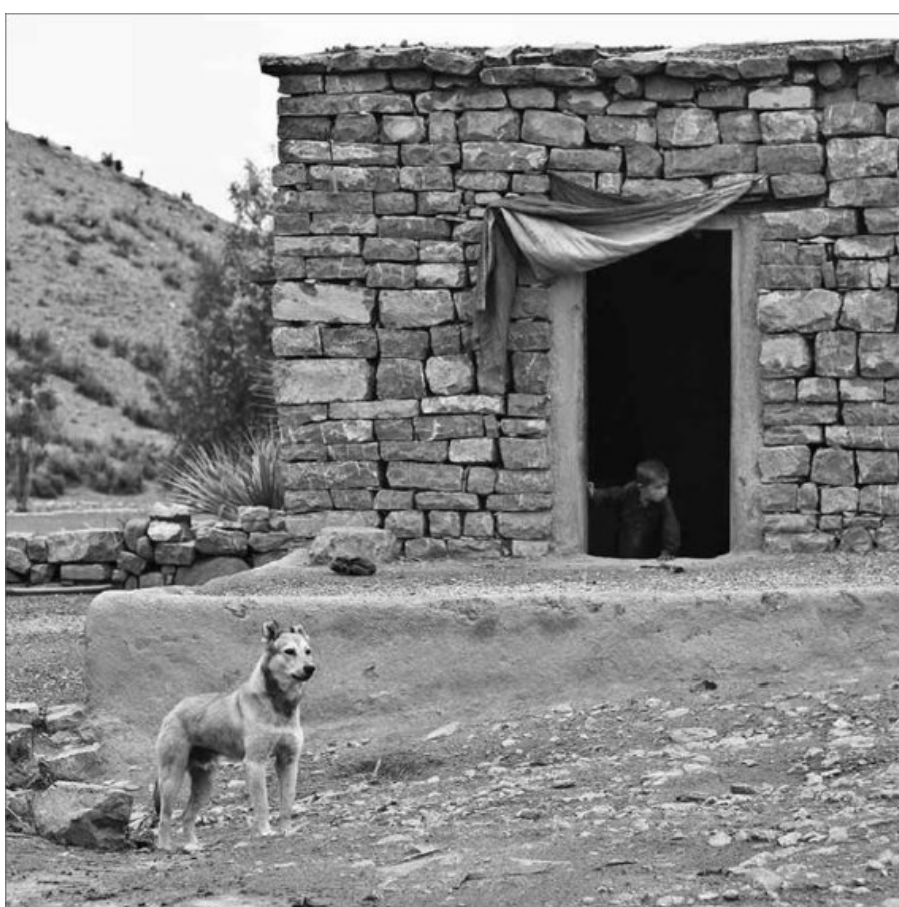
If you are creating a simple series, say of portraits, then it can be helpful if you maintain consistency of technique from one shot to the next. Consistency of technique means keeping the focal length, angle of view, framing, ISO, white balance and depth-of-field the same, or nearly the same, in all your shots.

So for example, if one picture is taken from eye-level, try and take them all from eye-level; if the focal length stays the same, you may need to step farther away for larger objects (or people with bigger heads) and closer for smaller objects, and so on. Also try to avoid using flash in some shots and not in others.

Also, be careful with cropping. Make sure that you don't wind up with a series of images with too many different ratios as it can look amateurish, although the occasional deviation can add interest.

Consider using square format too. We see so many rectangular-shaped photos that square format can add interest. Consider the two images shown below. The first one is uncropped and the second one has been cropped to a square format. I think you'll agree that the square format forces a visually stronger relationship between the dog and the child.





Disciplining yourself in this way helps you to be more decisive and to think ahead. It is also a useful discipline when you come to create longer or more complex essays.

If you are creating a narrative kind of essay then you can be more flexible with your approach although longer essays which have a series within the overall narrative may benefit from a consistent approach in that area.

In summary, this section has looked at the single image and the importance of:

1. Conveying powerful emotions in your images
2. Looking for layers of meaning in a photograph
3. Shooting in black-and-white or colour based on appropriateness of the subject
4. Shooting in RAW and converting to black and white in post processing
5. How finding the best angle to shoot at can make or break a shot
6. Consistency of technique when creating series of images

## 3. Types of Photo Essays

### 1. A simple series

A simple series such a sequence of portraits is often a good way to get started. Each image in the series should have some unique, unifying quality to it which makes the viewer want to keep looking. One such example is Kate Kirkwood's beautiful photo essay called [Cow Spines](#) which is a series of images of cows which have been photographed in their natural environment with a landscape visible in the distance.

What makes the photo essay stand out is the fact that Kirkwood has taken each shot with the back of a cow very close to the camera to make it look like a rock or a hill and with the background sharply focussed, the two planes have become visually fused. It's difficult to describe well so I hope you will take the time to click the link above as it is well worth a look.

### 2. Highlight photo essays

This type of photo essay centres on an interesting event, and is journalistic in nature. It is usually a news type event and could be a natural disaster such as a *tsunami* or a man-made event such as a bomb blast, and so on. It could also be smaller scale such as the highlights of a local wedding or school fête or perhaps a series of images of the most spectacular events of a carnival.

This type of photo essay can be linear but more often it is not because a highlights essay usually concentrates on just the peak events. There may be no clear story line as the essay centres on images which show the central characters or events and the most dramatic aspects, with additional images to support the context. An example of this kind of essay is [The Year of the Horse](#) on Time.com.

Other examples could include a year-end review or highlights of the life of a well-known personality who has just died. The photographer's aim is to present only the peak moments and most dramatic shots in a series of images.

### 3. Time-sequence photo essays

Any linear sequence of events such as a news story comes into this category. One example could be the aftermath of an earthquake, and how the people affected rebuild their lives over time. The time span for a time-sequence photo essay can be one day or one year or even a



decade or two or longer. Some people devote a lifetime to one particular subject, coming back to it again and again over a very long period of time.

Obviously, when a photo essay is done in this way, the gaps of time between the images will be greater. This can produce an essay on one theme which can be viewed in a similar way to a series of still images which have been taken from different points of a movie.

Another example of a time-sequence photo essay is one which shows a process, how something is done from beginning to end such as how pasta is made or how a sculpture is carved out of a block of wood.

The life span of an animal from birth to death would also work well as a time sequence as would a very short time-scale such as a 'day-in-the-life' type of essay which is chronological in its underlying structure. Here is a link to a day-in-the-life [photo essay by student, Kelsey Sutcliffe](#). For more essays made by students at Colby College, follow [this link](#).

## 4. Location photo essays

These can be done locally or when travelling and are usually thematic rather than linear. The location could be quite small, such as your school or home, or could be a whole region or country, for example the Basque region in the south of France and the north of Spain.

A good example of a photo essay on a whole region is [South Sudan](#) by Paula Bronstein. Although the images are not sequential, every single one is captivating in its composition and content. Sudan faces many challenges some of which are huge, and Bronstein combines her artistic background with a photojournalist's training to convey a compelling photo essay about the people living there.

If you think you have to travel far afield to create a location photo essay, have a look at German-born French photographer Christoph Sillem's photo essay called [The Other Disney World: A Creepy, Empty Village](#) which was shot on a single road. The idea came to him when he was browsing around on Google Maps and spotted a large circular road outside Paris. The road runs around Euro Disney but bizarrely it looks like a brand new ghost town, no people, no cars, no life, only the odd leaf.

With a location photo essay your subject matter can be presented in a non-linear way but it is also possible to order it in a linear fashion, for example, a train journey from one point to another within a certain area such as the metro line across Paris. If the photo essay is non-linear though, it doesn't mean that you don't need to choose carefully the sequence of the images but we will come back to this topic further

on in Section 6 on editing.

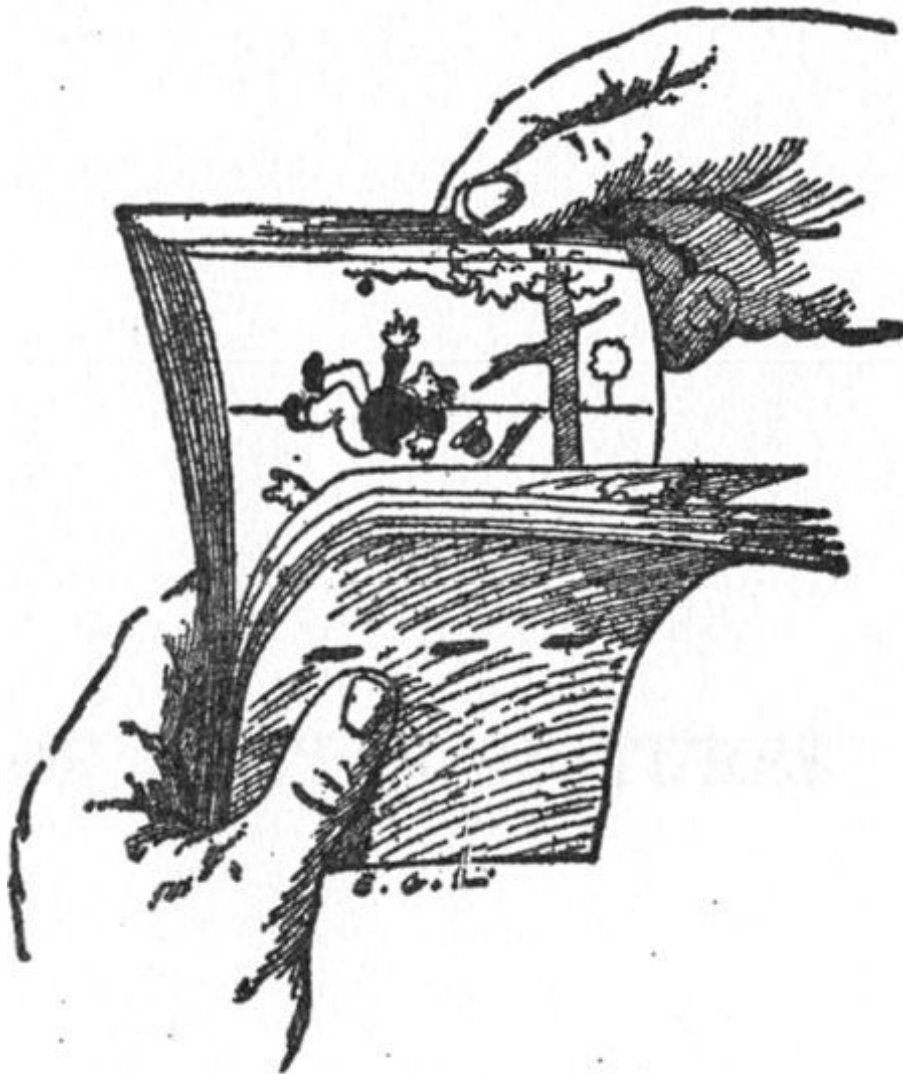
## 5. Idea photo essays

This can be a series of photographs around a more abstract idea such as love, health, hope, poverty and so on. A good example of such a photo essay is [Skid Row – A Battle of Misery and Hope](#) by Associated Press photographer Jae C. Hong – follow the link to see the full essay.

An idea photo essay is often more difficult to sequence and it can be helpful to have an element that is common to each of the photos. This could be design elements such as a colour or an icon that repeats, for example. This can be challenging to do but the time scale for shooting this kind of essay can be adapted easily to fit in with your other commitments.

## 6. Flick books





## THE KINEOGRAPH.

Above: The Linnet Kineograph by John Barnes Linnet (Image supplied by [Lothar Laaf](#))

The last type of photo essay is the **flick book** (sometimes called a **flip book**) which is a series of pictures that change subtly from one image to the next so when you hold it in one hand and flick through the pages quickly with the other, the cumulative effect is a bit like a jerky film similar to early animation.

The first flick book first appeared in 1868 as a series of drawings. It wasn't called a flick book but a kineograph (see above) which means

'moving pictures'. Kineographs were often created as books for children, but today's flick books are more often geared towards adults and use photographs instead of drawings, and can be found as features in book and magazines. This way of presenting images today is usually for commercial use and may be used to help promote the latest fashions, for example.

Flip books are also a fun way to present photos from weddings, parties and so on and many print companies can print flip books for you. You can find examples of flick books on YouTube or if you are interested in having your own printed, check out companies such as *Snapfish* and *A Little Scene*.

In summary, this section has looked at six different types of photo essays from which you can choose:

1. A simple series such as a sequence of portraits
2. A highlights photo essay which looks at peak events
3. A time-sequence photo essay which is linear and chronological such as a day-in-the-life story
4. A location photo essay such as the metro line across Paris
5. An idea photo essay based on a more abstract idea such as love, health, hope, poverty and so on
6. A flick book to present photos from a wedding or party

## 4. Planning Your Photo Essay

### 1. Choose

First of all you need to **choose a theme or topic** that you care deeply about. If you are fascinated by your subject, you will give it your best, so make sure you are really interested in your subject and that way you can be sure that your viewers will be grabbed by the topic too. Something you care about deeply is usually what others care about too. Perhaps it's a heart-tugging subject such as the plight of the homeless or a more controversial topic such as animals kept in zoos. If you're stuck for ideas you can try browsing news websites such as CNN or Time.com.

### 2. Research

All photo essays can benefit from some research and preparation. Exactly what form such research takes will depend upon your subject.

You may find it useful to contact an organisation or company related to your topic. For example, if you are doing a photo essay on animals in zoos then you could write to the Born Free Foundation for information about zoos in your area. You could then contact your local zoo before your visit. They would be able to give you lots of information on your chosen topic and might even offer to give you a tour of the zoo. People generally want to be helpful and most will take an interest in your project plus you can offer some of your images for publicity purposes in return.

When I worked on my photo essay 'China's Female Imams' I was researching Chinese mosques by actually visiting them when I was lucky enough to meet an English-speaking Professor of Islamic studies at the University in Lanzhou who loved the idea of my project and went out of his way to find me a female interpreter and contacted various all-women mosques to see if they wanted to be part of the story. Without this contact, the whole thing would have been virtually impossible as I didn't speak very much Chinese! I was lucky but you can be lucky too. Pour your heart and soul into your story and magic can happen.

My advice is: don't rush the research phase as not only is it going to be really interesting but you never know where it will lead. Be thorough and make notes on everything. From your research you will be in a position to set a time frame for your essay, work out costs involved,

make a list of important activities, and decide on key shots and so on.

### 3. Clarify

Once you have researched your topic, write out a few paragraphs on your chosen topic to help clarify your thoughts and plan the shots you need to make. What are the core emotions you wish to convey? In my online photo essay on [China's Female Imams](#), the core emotion I wanted to convey was the *independence* of the women I photographed. Identifying the core emotion can really help to ground your thoughts when you are out in the field.

Think also about which type of essay you want to make. Will it be a thematic essay or a time sequence essay? Does it have a narrative running through it? Or does it belong to one of the other categories in Section 3? Knowing the type of essay you plan to create is key to organising your photo shoots.

### 4. Plan

Before you take any photographs, plan your shots (see the next section) on paper and make decisions such whether to use black and white or colour and what format you will use. Make sure you have the right equipment for the job such as adequate battery power, lens filters, memory cards and so on, and write down a list of what you need to complete the whole project.

Think about lighting and whether you want to use natural light or flash. Do you need to buy a reflector? Are there any props you would like to use? Think about the weather... think, plan and think some more. Then create a schedule for your photo shoots. The more you plan, the better your chance of successfully capturing all the shots you need.

For a first photo essay, five to fifteen shots would be a good goal to aim for but that doesn't mean you would only take 15 photographs. If it is a series of portraits, perhaps you will only take a few shots for each person which you would then edit down to the 15 best images. But if it is a themed essay or a location photo essay then you may end up with literally hundreds of photos on your memory card.

There is no single answer but proper preparation is essential no matter what answer you chose.

In summary, this section has looked at how to plan your essay in four stages:

1. Choose a theme or topic based on a subject you care deeply about such as the plight of the homeless
2. Research your theme thoroughly and contact people who might be sympathetic towards your project
3. Clarify your topic by identifying which type of essay you want to make and identify the core emotion
4. Plan your shots on paper and make a list of all the equipment you will need

## 5. Planning Your Shots

Decide how much time you are going to give to making the photographs and choose a deadline. After that date you will be making a final selection and post processing the images. Write out a list of the photos that you want to make in that time frame.

Think and plan the lighting. Will you shoot everything using available light? If so, you may want to plan your shots to be taken in daylight, as much as you possibly can because synthetic lighting gives off a colour cast which can be unflattering in portrait shots. You can of course alter the White Balance either before shooting or in post-processing but conscious choices made before shooting usually lead to greater consistency and potentially less work.

Good light can make or break a shot. For example, the next photograph (below) works well because the loom is bathed in beautiful, golden light while the rest of the room is much darker. This kind of strong contrast helps to create interesting shots. In truth, all light is good light but if you can shoot a scene that is only partially lit, like the one below, you will create images with added drama.



Think as well if are there any interesting people you would like to include. Are there people who add colour and life to the story, any

interesting faces or crazy characters? Make a list.

Look for details that convey emotion such as the poignant shot of the small teddy bear in [Li Jin's Aftermath of Sichuan story](#). Look as well for images that help the viewer understand the location (they have almost certainly never been there themselves) and think of each of your shots as if it were a single paragraph in the overall story.

Give particular attention to what the very first, opening photograph will be as that is the one that will draw the viewer in or not, depending on how powerful it is. The concluding shot also needs careful thought as that will pull the story together and round it off.

When planning and creating your list of shots, consider the following nine types of photos you may want to plan to include in your story. Not all of them are absolutely essential but you do need to understand all of the following so you can plan which ones you want to include and which may be irrelevant. Of course, serendipity will play a part too so be sure to schedule enough time to be able to just wander around with your camera, talking to people, looking and discovering. It's one of the best parts of creating a photo essay as you will always find surprises.

## 1. The lead photo

This needs to be a strong image in terms of composition such as [the cover of Saudi Aramco World](#), the magazine in which my photo essay on [China's Female Imams](#) was printed. The lead photo needs to draw the viewer in because it is the shot that will initially 'sell' the story or not so make it powerful. A close-up shot of someone at work or a wide angle view of a village scene taken from a distance are two other examples. See the next two photos below.





Above: Welder at Work





Above: Manarola Village, Cinque Terra, Italy

## 2. A scene-setting shot (also known as an ‘establishing shot’)

In [China's Female Imams](#) the second image in the photo essay shows a glimpse into the prayer room of a Chinese mosque with women seated at the other end of the room, presumably in prayer. This shows where the action takes place but more than that it shows the main characters, the women who frequent the mosque. We can see that they are Muslims, and the story is about women-only mosques in China, the only country in the world that has mosques run by and for women only. It doesn't show individual women who pray there nor the female *imam* who runs the mosque but rather establishes the essentials of the story. If you like, it sets the scene for what is to come as it includes many of the elements the viewer will meet later on.

## 3. Sequential shots

Depending on which type of photo essay you are going to shoot, you may want to plan a sequence of shots which could form the main core of the story. My [No Dogs Allowed](#) essay includes a sequence of shots, numbers 11 to 17 inclusive. This sequence is essential to the story and cannot be changed around without your viewer losing the plot. You don't necessarily have to shoot a sequence exactly as it will be presented in the final essay but it helps to have a clear idea in advance of how the sequence might be put together.

## 4. Portraits

Within the main sequence you will most likely want to include portraits of individuals and groups who are pertinent to the story. Ideally, individual portraits show the character of the people and are usually best shot fairly close up as head-and-shoulders or half-length portraits.

The other type of portrait shots to include are environmental portraits which are shot from further away to include the room or area in which the person is placed. This kind of shot often works well in a photo essay as the viewer can glean so much information from even a single image.

You may want to include both types of portraits but whichever one you are shooting it should be built around your characters. Also, a mixture of posed and candid shots can work well as it avoids monotony.

## 5. Panoramic shots

If you are planning to display your work in a magazine or on a gallery wall you might like to consider creating some panoramic shots. These can be made by stitching together several images in Photoshop or other photo editing software. In Section 7 there is a discussion of a photo essay in which two panoramic shots are included so you can see for yourself how this works within the context of a bigger story.

## 6. Interactive shots

People who are peripheral to the story can be included successfully as it helps to establish the life of your main character and adds depth and dimension to your story. In [No Dogs Allowed](#) for example, shots 9 and 10 specifically show the main character interacting with others and we learn more about his life and the difficulties he encounters. Children, other people in the town, market tradesmen etc are other ideas for shots with the potential for showing interaction like this. The possibilities are endless.

## 7. Detail shots

Detail shots don't carry the narrative forward as such but help to round it out and can add drama to the story. A good example of this is photograph number 10 in my essay on [Hunting in France](#) where a dog is tearing at the flesh of a dead boar. It's a gory shot and adds drama to the story in a graphic way. Detail shots are close-ups and it's difficult to plan for them. So make sure you take lots of close-ups

when you are actually shooting the story and make your selection of details afterwards, when the main elements of the story are in place.

Here's another good example of a detail shot which has drama and impact on its own but would fit in well with many different essays:



## 8. Summing-up shot

This pulls the story together for the viewer. It's not necessarily the most powerful shot in the whole sequence but it is very important and must articulate your ideas succinctly. [Number 14](#) in *Hunting in France* shows us the animal carcass in a room set aside for carving up dead animals. This is a summing-up shot as it shows the viewer the final result of the day's events.

## 9. Concluding shot

You will need an image to close the essay, one that says definitively 'The End'. In *No Dogs Allowed*, I have used an image I made of Zhang Dehong taken from behind him as he walks back into his clinic. He has changed back into his white clinician's coat which we saw him wearing early in the essay and so we know that he is going back to work. Visually, it completes the cycle, as does the final image ([number 15](#)) in *Hunting in France* where we see the remains of the animal piled up on a wheelbarrow. In both cases, nothing more can be said.

In summary, this section has looked at nine types of images which you might like to include in your essay:

1. The lead photo which must be strong in terms of composition
2. A scene setting shot (or establishing shot)
3. Sequential shots which could form the main core of the story
4. Portrait shots which show individual characters and environmental portraits which give more information
5. Panoramic shots for visual variety
6. Interactive shots to establish the life of the main character and to add dimension to the essay
7. Detail shots to add drama and round out the story
8. The summing-up shot which pulls the story together
9. The concluding shot which definitively says 'The End'

## 6. Editing Your Photo Essay

### 1. The first edit

If you have a digital camera, the chances are that you will have hundreds of images on your hard drive maybe more if your photo shoots spanned weeks or months. So I would suggest that the first thing to do is to narrow down your choice of images to 100 shots. These will be your best images obviously, but you will undoubtedly need to include other images that help to tell the story, and which may not be your absolute best. Make sure that you check through the list above in the section on planning your shots.

If you can, I strongly advise printing out your initial edit. The photos only need to be small, around postcard size or 4 inches by 6 inches, and they don't need to be great quality but the merit of printing them out is that you can spread them all out on a desk or table in order to see them all at once.

This is very helpful when creating your story as you can shuffle them around easily, try out different sequences or take some out, put others back in and so on. It also gives you a certain objectivity which you don't have when looking at them on a screen. Trust me, this is not a waste of time or money.

At this stage you may like to invite one or two trusted friends to give you honest feedback on your shots. They may really like certain shots that you're not sure about and will advise you to keep them in or they may say they don't understand a particular shot or sequence which you can then change.

It's more about what works within the context of the essay rather than what you think are your best shots. Often we are attached to a certain photograph because, for example, it has a powerful composition but it may just be the case that the photo in question doesn't really fit in with the sequence. It can be hard to spot this sometimes.

It's very easy to get caught up in memories from the photo shoot so knowing what others see can be extremely helpful. Also, it isn't always the most emotional pictures that need to go in because your audience needs background information too so try to balance both aspects.

Next, make a second choice, whittling it down to about 20 images. Shuffle them around, try different combinations. What is most fascinating about the editing phase of a photo essay is the creative process that emerges and how you find new combinations and

juxtapositions that enhance your initial work. The final edit for a photo essay can be any number of photos. Try to aim for 10-12 if this is your first essay but you could start with as few as six.

Be ruthless and avoid the temptation to explain too much by putting in shots that you like but don't add significantly to the narrative or commentary. Just as we tend to fall asleep when somebody repeats himself when telling a story, so superfluous information leads to the loss of attention from your audience. Also make sure you are aware of the implications contained in your images so you do not repeat information unwittingly and thereby have the same effect of boring your audience.

## 2. Creating a Series

Although variety is important in your photos, if it is longish, say 15 photos or more, then you need to give it a structure otherwise visually it just becomes a series of one photo after the other. One way to give it structure is to create a series.

To do this, you need to identify the key images such as the lead photo, the scene-setting shot, the summing-up shot and the concluding shot. You might change your mind later but for the time being this will give you a frame-work within which to create the main sequence.

The main body of the story may be a sequence of portraits or a linear sequence of events with a narrative, for example. There are many possibilities but the important point to remember is that your photos may work better together if they are stylistically similar. It might also be possible to group your portraits into more than one style but don't worry overly about this as sometimes it just doesn't work out as you would have liked it.

## 3. Using a narrative structure

It can be very satisfying to put together a photo essay using a narrative structure because, quite simply, everyone loves a story.

The German playwright Gustav Freytag (1816-1895) said that in a narrative structure there are five parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. This structure can be successfully applied to certain photo essays.

First of all is the **exposition** which shows us who the main characters are and something about their lives and who they are as people. It shows us the main character and his goal within the story. Then comes an *inciting incident* which creates conflict. The **rising action** follows the inciting incident and is a build-up of events as the main character moves towards his or her goal. *Conflict* occurs when there is



a disagreement with one or more people. This leads to the **climax** of the narrative, the crunch point, such as a battle for example. The climax is followed by **falling action**, and then the events lead to some kind of **resolution**, a happy or sad ending to the story. The resolution gives a feeling that this is the end, all the strands have been drawn together, everything that needed to be explained, has been explained.

Don't worry too much if the outline of the structure didn't immediately make sense to you as you can see how it works in Section 7 in the second essay [No Dogs Allowed](#).

## 4. Adding captions

Think of each image in a photo essay as being like a chapter in a book or, perhaps better, as a single scene in a play. If you have a synopsis of the play in the form of a short paragraphs then the scenes you are viewing make sense within the context of the overall story. But if that synopsis is missing, then your interpretation could be totally false. So although the photographs don't necessarily need a lengthy description to explain them, they will benefit from good captions.

However, the captions are not there to tell the story, they are there to offer the facts. It is the sequence of photos that must tell the story. Captions are longer than titles but you need to learn how to be concise while putting across the exact information you want so that your viewers can concentrate on 'reading' your photographs.

In summary, this section has looked at how to edit your photos to create an essay:

1. Make a first edit of 100 photos and print them out fairly small
2. Shuffle them around and try different sequences
3. Get feedback from friends who you trust to give you an honest opinion
4. Make a second choice of about 20 images and try out different sequences
5. Make a final selection - be ruthless
6. Create a structure and/or narrative
7. If creating a structured essay identify the key images such as the lead photo, the scene-setting shot, the summing-up shot and the concluding shot
8. If creating a narrative order your photos according to exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution
9. Add captions which are short and factual

## 7. Two Sample Essays

### First Essay: Sichuan – The Aftermath

In this section I am going to look at two photo essays. The first one is called [Sichuan: The Aftermath](#), by Chinese photographer Li Jin who visited Sichuan shortly after the earthquake of 2008. It refers back to some of the types of shots in **Section 5: Planning Your Shots**. Please click on the above link to launch the essay then read on below.



First of all, think about the title which sums up the essay. It is short, just three words, and to the point. The first word is called '**the information word**' and it is the most important.

The cover image is reproduced above and the caption is *Communal Washing Facility, Sichuan*. This is [the lead photo](#), the first image the viewer sees, and it sums up the story in one shot. Here we see a woman in a dark and dingy communal wash house, all alone, attempting to impose some sort of order in her life. The mainly monochromatic composition has strong lines, both diagonal and vertical, and the pale yellow and blue colours stand out against the bleak background. It is a powerful composition within which the photographer has captured a sense of alienation and loneliness and conveys a sense of this women's struggle.

After the introduction and preface, is the [scene-setting shot](#). There are no people in the photo which gives it a poignancy especially when coupled with the soft toy in the foreground. It says destruction of



buildings, lives, and people including children. In fact, most of the first part of the essay sets the scene with shots of the damage the earthquake did to buildings. The rest of the essay is about the people who have lost members of their families and their homes, and are now living in 'tent city'.

A photo essay such as this is slightly complex to lay out as nearly all the images go together in pairs. This means you have to be careful that the left hand page doesn't visually compete with the right hand page.

Look at pages 36-37 for example. The left hand page is simple in composition with just one close-up [portrait](#). The right hand page is more complex, it is a group shot with the girl in the middle of the page. On pages 38-39, there is a portrait shot of a nurse on the left side and [an interactive shot](#) of the nurse in action on the right side. There are other pages where this format is used which you will find if you look through the rest of the essay.

Don't be afraid to leave white space occasionally as in pages 12-13 or any other way that you can think. Be creative! White space can help to break up a rhythm that is in danger of becoming monotonous.

Within the main body of the essay are two [panoramic shots](#) (pages 10-11 and 22-23). Each one is made up of 2-3 images carefully fitted together using a photo editor. This not only gives variety to the layout but it also lends impact and interest to the story.

The back cover is the only image in black and white. It is the [concluding shot](#) and was converted to black and white. The reason for this was because as it is a picture of a memorial to the Chinese people who died in the disaster, the sombre tones of black and white emphasises the sadness and sense of loss.

Another [detail shot](#) of just the soft toy on its own has been used to close the story (page 47) and to create a sense of completeness. This is the [summing-up shot](#). Including detail shots such as the one of the soft toy help to give a visual balance to your sequence of photographs. Also, this image has been put opposite one of a smiling girl holding a lotus blossom which is in a reused bottle of water. The lotus blossom is a beautiful flower which grows by putting its roots into the mud, and has thus become a symbol of growth and hope. This works particularly well here as on the page for the back cover there is a charity plea for money to help children who were orphaned in the disaster.

The only type of shots this essay does not include are [sequential shots](#) because there is no narrative within it so let's now look at how a narrative essay unfolds.

## Second Essay: No Dogs Allowed

The second essay is presented here in its entirety, one image on a page at a time with accompanying text. This way of presenting it is good for understanding the individual images but not quite as good for grasping it as a whole so I have also created an online slideshow which you will find by following [this link](#).

The essay is a 'day-in-the-life' type of photo essay about a blind man and his dog. I made the photographs in 2007 whilst travelling in China after finding out that there were only three guide dogs for the blind in the whole of China even though there were around 16 million people registered as visually impaired at that time. And in case you're thinking, 'oh that was five years ago things might be better today,' well, read on and you'll find out that things haven't changed that much.

First of all, some background information to the essay to avoid the necessity for extended captions and so that viewers can follow the flow of the story through the images more easily. Creating a background story is useful if you want to approach editors with your story as you have some ready-made text to send to them.

Until the year 2000, the concept of a dog that could guide a blind person through the streets, negotiate obstacles and take him or her on a bus or train to their workplace did not exist in China. No one had ever seen a guide dog in any public or private place. Moreover, many Chinese are afraid of large dogs such as Labrador Retrievers, which are the best kind of dogs for the job. Blind people had to stay at home until a friend or relative was available to act as a guide.

Things began to change when China put in a bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games, as the organizers had to agree that if they were the hosts, guide dogs would be allowed to accompany participants in the Paralympic Events.

To reinforce this, a nationwide law was passed in 2008 stating that dogs must be allowed to travel with their companions, and although some did participate in the Paralympics, today the law is largely ineffective because dogs are still barred by restaurant and shop owners, bus drivers, and subway attendants, and so on, right across the country.

Six years on from the Olympic Games, there are only an estimated 70 guide dogs for the blind in the whole of China, which come from the China Guide Dog Training Centre founded by Wang Jingyu and the Nanjing Police Dog Training Centre.

Training a guide dog at the Centre takes up to two years. Puppies are first given a home by a volunteer family for socialisation and basic obedience training until they are one year old when they meet with their human companion at the Centre and begin intensive training together.

At the Centre, dogs are trained to walk in a straight line, avoid obstacles, find a destination and find a seat. The dogs need to be emotionally stable, patient, courageous and able to maintain focus in order to deal with emergencies without reacting negatively. They are only allowed to eat proper dog food and are not allowed to play with dog toys so that they cannot become distracted when out on the street.

China is not yet registered with the International Guide Dog Federation because the Federation only admits countries where more than 1 percent of the visually impaired people use guide dogs. In a country with an estimated 16 million people with visual disabilities, that means China needs 160,000 guide dogs.

While staying in Dalian, I went to visit the Training Centre to see the dogs and their trainers. At the centre I spent time with the dogs and the staff and was invited to visit Zhang Dehong and his guide dog Ben-Ben. The repetition of a single syllable name like this is a sign of affection in China.

Ben-Ben was, at that time, one of only three fully trained dogs who were out working in the world and living with their owners. I jumped at the chance to go to see them both in their home in the nearby town of Jinzhou.

Zhang Dehong has been blind from birth and has worked all his life as a massage therapist. He is the Vice-President of the China Massage Association of Blind Practitioners, and President of the Dehong Traditional Chinese Medical Massage Hospital which he set up himself.

He works in the clinic as Assistant Chief Physician and as the clinic is attached to his home he doesn't need Ben-Ben to help him when he goes to work. However, sometimes he likes to go for a walk or even go to the shops. Here is a day-in-the-life type story of what happened when he decided to go to the local department store with Ben-Ben.

The essay has a [narrative structure](#) and to avoid confusion I haven't analysed it in terms of the individual shots but in terms of the narrative. Also, I have included the captions here, exactly as they are on the slideshow.

The first three images comprise the beginning of the **exposition**. We meet Zhang Dehong and his dog and see them together working in the

clinic.

**Below:** This is Ben-Ben, a seeing-eye dog (guide dog for the blind) who lives and works with Zhang Dehong (sitting behind him), a blind-from-birth massage practitioner and Vice-President of the China Massage Association of Blind Practitioners.





**Above:** Zhang Dehong is President of the Dehong Traditional Chinese Medical Massage Hospital and holds the title of Assistant Chief Physician. He is seen here with before-and-after photos of clients he has treated.



**Above:** When Zhang is working in his clinic, Ben-Ben is usually by his side.

The exposition continues in the next 7 shots as Zhang decides to go out for a walk. It's not until image 11 that the **inciting incident** occurs when Zhang arrives outside a major shopping centre. He feels



conflict because he would like to go in but is worried that they won't let Ben-Ben in too.



Above: When Zhang is not working he likes to go out walking with Ben-Ben.



**Above:** Ben-Ben is now harnessed and eager to hit the streets!



**Above:** When out walking, Ben-Ben often encounters obstacles but he is trained to avoid them, even if it means walking in the middle of the road.





**Above:** Certain obstacles are just too complicated for a dog to understand but fortunately Zhang has encountered this one before and successfully steers himself and Ben-Ben through.



**Above:** Chinese people are not used to seeing blind people on the streets and have probably never seen a guide dog so they often stare in amazement as Zhang and Ben-Ben pass by.



**Above:** Others are very helpful and keen to make sure Zhang and his dog can cope safely with steps.



**Above:** Sometimes you get oddballs who want to have a go at steering the dog!





**Above:** Eventually Zhang arrives outside the department store and would like to go inside but wonders if they will let Ben-Ben in too.

The shot above is the first **inciting incident** which creates conflict within Zhang. He must make a decision and follow it through in the next three shots which represent the build-up of events, the **rising action**, as he moves towards his goal of going shopping with his dog by his side.



**Above:** Zhang decides to just go for it but Ben-Ben's doggy intuition seems to be saying something else. Zhang gives him a bit of

encouragement.



**Above:** Once inside, Zhang encounters a security guard who, never having had a dog his store before, radios his team for back up while concerned shoppers crowd round.





**Above:** The rest of the security team arrive and a discussion ensues with an intermediary. Zhang and Ben-Ben wait patiently for the outcome... and the answer is...



Above: No! No dogs allowed!

This is the **climax** of the narrative, the crunch point as the security guard states categorically that dogs are not allowed anywhere inside the shop. After the climax comes **falling action** as Zhang and Ben-Ben are escorted out of the shop in the next two shots.



Above: Zhang and Ben-Ben are escorted to the door by the security guard...



**Above:** ... and head out onto the streets again.

All that remains now in the narrative is to create some kind of **resolution** so that the viewers are satisfied that this is the end of the story. The next two shots in this essay say just that.



**Above:** Thwarted in their attempt to go shopping, nothing remains but to go home...





Above: ... and back to work once more.

## 8. Publishing Your Work

After all your hard work, it's important that your wonderful photo essay doesn't just stay on your hard drive. You have an audience out there and they want you to share with them! So I have listed below a few options you might like to explore.

### 1. Make an online slideshow

If you have your own blog, then using it to present your work as a slideshow can be a good way to start. There are many ways to make a good slideshow which can include music and different transitions as the image changes from one to the next. Here are a few free slideshow programmes to consider but please note I haven't tried any of them personally so none of them come with any endorsements. However, they're all free so you have nothing to lose by trying one or two.

[Wondershare Fantashow](#)

[Smilebox](#)

[Visual Slideshow](#)

[Bolide Slideshow Creator](#)

### 2. Get published in a magazine

Magazines, both off-line and on, often publish multi-page photo essays about a wide variety of news-worthy events from sports to disasters to celebrity gossip and fashion. There is nothing wrong with writing to the editor of a magazine that you think would be a good fit for your essay. If you research magazines online they very often have the email address of the picture editor or person responsible for decision-making on such issues. Make your email short and well-focussed and attach half a dozen images to it.

When I sold my photo essay on [China's Female Imams](#) to Saudi Aramco World, this was the route I took. The editor was not convinced at first so I sent him another selection of images. Then he agreed, and I was well paid for it! So don't despair if you don't get a yes right away or until you find the right editor, the right set of images, and the right price for you.

### 3. Documentary websites

Exhibiting your essay alongside other photographers' essays is a good way to see where your voice fits in. There are many sites available on

the internet where you can publish your work but I would just like to mention two which are particularly high quality and affordable.

The first one I recommend is [SocialDocumentary.net](http://SocialDocumentary.net), an organisation for photographers from all over the world who want to document and exhibit photographs concerning issues that affect them and us.

SDN does have fairly high standards though. Your work must be aesthetically good and technically acceptable. However, less than 10% of exhibits are rejected so it's definitely worth considering, even for beginners.

You have to pay a small sum to exhibit with them – currently \$0.85 per image per year - and your exhibit must have a minimum of six photos. However, you can also take advantage of their 90-day free trial and there is no credit card required. If you go for the free-trial option there is an upper limit of 36 images for your essay but you could start with a six-image essay which would cost a mere \$5.01 for one year - definitely affordable, and a six-image essay is definitely doable!

SDN recently launched a new service for photographers and buyers where buyers can license images or buy prints via their featured galleries on Photoshelter.com. Photographers with live or expired exhibits on SDN can apply to license their work for editorial, creative, commercial or non-profit use or to sell fine art prints of their work through SDN. Also, next year (2015) they will be publishing a free SDN Documentary Annual which will be sent to photo editors and buyers of photography. You never know, your work could be included!

Even if you don't want to exhibit with them, you can become a member free of charge and they will send you their monthly newsletter which contains links to some really interesting documentary exhibits. This is a great resource if you want to learn more about how to make a photo essay and documentary photography in general.

The second site I recommend is [Sophot.com](http://Sophot.com).

Sophot.com is a website dedicated to social documentary photography, and in particular, socio-environmental photography. There is a wide range of themes ranging from alcoholism and animals to drugs, genocide, health care, hunger, poverty, religion, tourism, women, youth and many more.

The website has three language options, French, Spanish and English. You can choose the language you want on the homepage but it is in fact a French-based site and if you choose English as your preferred language, sometimes you have to hunt for the English translation. It



may be at the bottom of the page and other times it is nowhere to be found! However, it is a very good site and definitely worth a visit.

Sophot.com holds contests, has virtual galleries, a large database of photographers, and an off-line gallery in Paris called *Fait et Cause* where they hold exhibitions, photographers meet up, and organisations can search their database if they are looking for a photographer for their project.

Photographers are invited to submit projects for which they are seeking sponsorship. Sophot.com vets each submission based on the quality and quantity of photos in each essay. They also assess each applicant's ability to demonstrate how dedicated they are to an ethical approach. You can submit up to 15 photo essays in total, and it is free.

If you are serious about documentary photography then this is a great site to visit. Even if you don't want to submit work, you can subscribe to their newsletter and be notified when new exhibits are added.

## 4. Make your own online magazine

For longer photo essays, you might like to think about creating your own, online magazine. [Issuu.com](http://Issuu.com) lets you do just that, free of charge. Millions of people visit Issuu to browse online publications so if you decide to create your own magazine, you are potentially tapping into a very large audience. With the free starter subscription you can have up to 25 free publications. Publication size is 100 MB per publication. Also, there is an embed widget which you can use on your blog. It's a great deal considering it's free and Issuu also offers paid options called Plus and Premium for those who want greater functionality such as bigger publication size and so on.

## 5. Make your own book

Again for longer essays, if you want to produce your own print-on-demand book, Blurb is a good way to go. [Blurb](http://Blurb.com) has free desktop-publishing software called [Bookwright](http://Bookwright.com) with over 100 templates which you can customize to create something really unique.

You can also design your Blurb book directly in Adobe Lightroom. When you first launch Lightroom, go to the tab on the top right which says 'Book'. Click on that and the next screen will have another tab just below the tool bar on the right side which offers Book Settings. This panel gives you an array of menus which lets you choose everything you need such as different sizes, paper types, cover type and so on. It even tells you how much each unit will cost to produce. You can get a [free, 30-day trial for Lightroom](#) by following the link.

## 6. Exhibit in photography festivals

If you are a professional photographer you could consider applying to exhibit in a photography festival such as the International Festival of Photojournalism known as [Visa Pour l'Image](#). It takes place in September every year in Perpignan in the south of France. To be able to exhibit you need to send between 50 and 150 photos on ONE single story to the organisers. You can send more than one story but each one must have at least 50 images.

Other photography festivals worth considering include [Les Rencontres d'Arles](#) in the south of France and [Pingyao International Photography Festival](#) in Shanxi Province in China. Both sites are bilingual.

One of the great merits of exhibiting in many photography festivals is that the cost of mounting an exhibition is relatively low. As you can see in the shot below of Pingyao festival, the images were printed on good quality paper but not framed which is often the most expensive part. The venue itself was an empty warehouse and festivals often use the walls of buildings, both inside and out, which are temporarily out of use. All in all, this kind of event can have a wonderful bohemian feel to it and at the same time your work gets great exposure as so many people pass through festivals such as this.



If you live in the United States then you have probably heard of the [Fotofest Biennial](#) which was founded in 1983 and is the longest running photography festival in the States. There are photography festivals all over the world. Check out the list below for festivals in your country or go to <http://www.photofestivals.com.au/photo->

festivals for more information.

[Angkor Photo Festival](#)

[Athens Photo Festival](#)

[Atlanta Celebrates Photography](#)

[Auckland Festival of Photography](#)

[Ballarat International Foto Biennale](#)

[Belfast Photo Festival](#)

[Belo Horizonte International Photography Festival \(FIF-BH\)](#)

[Brighton Photo Fringe](#)

[California Photo Festival \(CLICK\)](#)

[Delhi Photo Festival](#)

[Diffusion - Cardiff International Festival of Photography](#)

[Dong Gang International Photo Festival](#)

[Filter Photo Festival](#)

[Flash Forward Festival Boston](#)

[Flash Forward Toronto](#)

[Flash Foreward London](#)

[Format International Photography Festival](#)

[Foto Art Festival](#)

[FOTOFEST BIENNIAL](#)

[Fotofestiwal Łódź](#)

[Fotográfica Bogotá](#)

[Fotoparad Uglich](#)

[fotofever: photography art fair](#)

[Head On Photo Festival](#)

[Independant Photography Festival Melbourne](#)

[International Photo Festival Knokke-Heist](#)

[Kaunas Photo](#)

[LOOK3 Festival of the Photograph](#)

[LagosPhoto](#)

[Liverpool LOOK photo Festival](#)

[London Photo Festival](#)

[ManifestO](#)

[Miami Street Photography Festival](#)

[Month of Photography Los Angeles \(MOPLA\)](#)

[Nano Foto Festival](#)

[New York Photo Festival](#)

[Night Contact London Multimedia and Photography Festival](#)

[Noorderlicht](#)

[Nordic Light International Festival of Photography](#)

[Obscura Festival](#)

[Organ Vida Photography Festival](#)

[Palm Springs Photo Festival](#)

[Paris Photo](#)

photo l.a.  
PhotoNOLA  
Photo Levallois  
Photo Plus Expo  
Portland Photo Month  
Photoville  
Chiang Mai Festival of Photography  
Circulations  
Daegu Photo Biennale  
Duesseldorf Photo Weekends  
EXPOSURE Photography Festival  
Festival Internacional de Fotografia de Porto Aleg  
Higashikawa Photo Festival  
Lianzhou Foto  
Lishui International Photography Festival  
Photo Fusion  
Photo Levallois  
Photofest Querétaro  
Photomed Mediterranean Photography Festival  
Pingyao International Photography Festival  
Queensland Festival of Photography  
Telleride Photo Festival  
Yangon Photo Festival  
Scotiabank CONTACT  
Texas Photo Festival  
The Miami Street Photography Festival (MSPF)  
Tokyo Photo Festival Competition  
Unseen Photo Fair  
Villa Noailles, Hyères  
Visa pour l'Image  
World Photography Organisation

## 9. Learn More

### 1. The Importance of Critiques

The ability to critique your own photos is an essential skill. It's important to be able to assess your shots technically and artistically. The two main points to consider when offering or giving a critique are technical and artistic merit.

**Technical merit** includes your use of the camera, exposure, camera speed and white balance, whether the colours look natural, the ISO setting and whether there is too little or too much digital noise, whether the focus is sharp, did you choose Aperture Priority or Shutter Priority, and so on.

**Artistic merit** includes compositional skills and whether or not the underlying design elements are harmonious and pleasing or powerful and compelling, plus consideration of things like whether or not the perspective could have been improved by choosing a different angle to shoot at.

Equally important is having your photos critiqued by others, although not necessarily your friends. Unless they are photographers themselves, it's likely they will just give you a general impression of your shot but won't go into any great depth. Also, friends want to be supportive and are unlikely to point out any negatives. If you don't have any photography friends who you can rely on to give you an objective critique, then I recommend having your images critiqued by one of the professional photographers at <http://www.gurushots.com>.

And, if you want to take critiquing one stage further, [Criticizing Photographs](#) by Terry Barrett is a very comprehensive book which "helps both beginning and advanced students of photography better develop and articulate thoughtful criticism". Be aware that this is an academic text book (the author is a Professor of Art Education) so it may not appeal to everyone.

### 2. Voices from the Past

Listed below are a few great photographers from the past who are worth studying if you want to learn and grow as a photographers. It's a very personal list but will help you get started. Click the link on any one to take you to the relevant Wikipedia article.

**André Kertész** (1894-1985): Kertész was a Hungarian-born photographer who felt that he didn't receive the recognition he

deserved in his lifetime but today is ranked as one of the world's most important photojournalists.

**Horst Faas** (1933-2012): Faas was a German photojournalist who worked for the Associated Press and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1965 for his combat photography in Vietnam in 1964. He won a second Pulitzer in 1972 for his coverage of the conflict in Bangladesh.

**W. Eugene Smith** (1918-1978): Smith was a photojournalist renowned for his uncompromising World War II images. Life Magazine has a slideshow called *Country Doctor* which Smith shot over a period of 23 days. It chronicles the day-to-day life of a man called Dr. Ernest Ceriani. The photo essay was a relatively new idea at that time and this essay was considered ground-breaking. It has a freshness and timeless quality to it which gives it strong appeal even today. View it here:

<http://life.time.com/history/life-classic-eugene-smiths-country-doctor/#1>

**Walker Evans** (1903-1975): Evans is another American photographer whose work with the FSA (Farm Security Administration) documenting the Great Depression is well known. You can view a photo essay on the Great Depression (not a slideshow but you can scroll through the images on the page) which includes photos made by Evans and **Dorothea Lange** (1895-1965), another well-known photographer who worked for the FSA. You can view it here: <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/depression/photoessay.htm>.

### 3. Contemporary Voices

Studying the photo essays of contemporary photographers is one of the best ways to learn. I recommend searching online for photo essays in magazines such as National Geographic, CNN, Geo, Sunday Times Magazine, New York Times Magazine Time, Newsweek, Human Rights Watch, the World Wide Fund for Nature and others. I've listed below some contemporary photographers to get you started and who I am sure you will find interesting.

**1. Brent Stirton:** - an award-winning, South African documentary photographer with photo essays online covering a wide range of issues. Mostly Africa but also the Yemen, Iraq and Afghanistan. He also has an amazing travel photography portfolio.

<http://www.brentstirton.com/>

**2. Paula Bronstein:** photojournalist who majored in fine art and whose work covers the war in Afghanistan, natural disasters, Mongolia, Burma, female marines, the shortest man on earth, Thailand, south Sudan and more.

<http://www.paulaphoto.com/>

**3. David Alan Harvey:** a member of Magnum who has done a lot of work for National Geographic magazine. He also runs a magazine called *Burn* which showcases the work of emerging photographers. His personal website has a wide range of essays including personal family stories, road trips and travel essays. His official website can be found at:

<http://www.davidalanharvey.com/>

**4. Bruce Davidson:** another Magnum member who is renowned for his work in Harlem. His Magnum portfolio includes work from England and Scotland which he made in the 1960s and a photo essay made in New Jersey in 1958 called *The Dwarf*. You can see his Magnum portfolio at:

<http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?>

[VP3=CMS3&VF=MAGO31\\_10\\_VForm&ERID=24KL53ZTH6](http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=CMS3&VF=MAGO31_10_VForm&ERID=24KL53ZTH6)

**5. David Douglas Duncan:** a photojournalist well known for his dramatic war photography. As of writing this book in June 2014, Duncan is 98 years old. You can see a slideshow of some of his Korean War images at:

<http://life.time.com/history/korean-war-classic-photos-by-david-douglas-duncan/#1>

**6. Mary Ellen Mark:** Mark is one of the best-known documentary photographers in the world today. She has received many awards and three fellowships. Two great books by Mark are [The Photo Essay](#), which contains photographs of famine victims in Ethiopia, and, probably her most famous series on prostitutes along Bombay's [Falkland Road](#). You can visit her website at <http://www.maryellenmark.com/>

## **[4. Some more interesting photo essays worth viewing:](#)**

1. Lens - <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/01/an-evolving-view-of-animals/> - Animals
2. Zed Nelson - <http://www.zednelson.com/?GunNation:1> - Guns
3. IPA - <http://invisiblephotographer.asia/2011/10/13/reminders-project-asian-photographers-grant-finalist-1-gmb-akash/> - Sex workers in Bangladesh - GMB Akash
4. SDN - [http://socialdocumentary.net/exhibit/fran\\_Antmann/2656](http://socialdocumentary.net/exhibit/fran_Antmann/2656) - Maya Healers
5. Time - <http://time.com/8515/hungry-planet-what-the-world-eats/> - What the world eats



## Any Questions?

Do you have any questions or comments? I would love to hear your thoughts. Please feel free to email me at [anne.darling@gmail.com](mailto:anne.darling@gmail.com).

One last thing... when you purchase a Kindle book you have the opportunity to rate the book and share your thoughts with other potential readers. If you enjoyed reading this book, I would very much appreciate it if you would post your thoughts and give it a star rating. Follow the link for your country to take you directly to my author page:

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FR: [http://www.amazon.fr/Ane-Darling/e/B00IDC6EV6/ref=ntt\\_athr\\_dp\\_pel\\_1](http://www.amazon.fr/Ane-Darling/e/B00IDC6EV6/ref=ntt_athr_dp_pel_1)

Many thanks, and I wish you all the best with your photography.

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*"If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn't need to lug  
around a camera" Lewis W. Hine (1874-1940)*

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Below: Powerhouse Mechanic, 1920 by Lewis W. Hine (1874-1940)

